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Le Roi d'Ys and Other Poems  
by Lewis Spence



LONDON: ELKIN MATHEWS, VIGO STREET, W.

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LE ROI D'YS



# LE ROI D'YS

And other Poems

BY

LEWIS SPENCE

LONDON

ELKIN MATHEWS, VIGO STREET, W.

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I DEDICATE THESE POEMS  
TO  
MY MOTHER  
WITH AFFECTION AND GRATITUDE

LEWIS SPENCE



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## Le Roi d'Ys

Paragon, le roi d'Ys  
Sat on a throne of golden fleece  
Legged with silver satyrs four,  
And tapestried with all the lore  
Of the weird weavers of Alcaire,  
In blood and gold and snow and fire.  
And every octagon was blent  
With symbols of the Orient.  
The casements twain above the throne  
With saint-filled crystal glowed and shone,  
And through the chamber music stole,  
Not for the sense, but for the soul,  
The murmuring of richest harps  
Sang with the fountains, where the carps  
Like swimming sunbeams flashed and finned,  
And through the casement came a wind  
That passed between the sails of ships,  
And stole the songs from sailors' lips.  
But Paragon sat on elate,  
And dreamed on more exalted state;  
The conquest of the Land of On  
That lies beyond the place of dawn;

That land no wizard ere may see  
By aid of rue or euphrasy.  
Set in a cycle of soft seas,  
Foamless, and fanned by faintest breeze,  
The mariner who would explore  
Must furl the sail, and ply the oar.

Its mountains show, the while he nears his goal  
The seven hues that make the rainbow's soul ;  
And endless plains of emerald outtrace  
The eyes' endeavour, hazing into space  
Of white and silver, blue and green,  
Soft as morning's pearly sheen.

Arise ! O princely Paragon  
And do thy golden armour on

And man the stoutest ships in all thy realm,  
And take thyself the compass and the helm.

O Paragon, le roi d'Ys,  
Charm a wind from out of the seas,  
Soft as an Abyssinian song  
To move thy silver sails along  
As breezes move a sleeping swan  
To bear thee to the Land of On.

\* \* \* \* \*

The morn was sweet as a lover's song  
When the ships of the Middle Seas  
With swart sea-faces all a-throng  
Left the high harbour of Ys.  
The banner with the dread dragon,  
Crest of princely Paragon,  
Flew, and flaunted, and flew,  
And the ringed and curlèd crew  
Sang of the sea in ecstasy

As mariners ever do.  
O Paragon, le roi d'Ys,  
Hast thou no song to sing of the seas?

" Yes, I have a song to sing of the seas  
That sway the Oceanides,  
Where ships step onward through a night  
Short as a song in its delight.  
Where the keel cuts reflected heaven  
Foaming the mirrored stars, as even  
Swift clouds o'erwhelm the pageantry  
Of the illuminated sky,  
And where dawn leaps the level line  
In sinuous scarlet serpentine,  
The hair of that high spirit the splendid sun,  
The emperor of earths, the thrall of none.  
Ocean of phantasy! here Love had planned  
A playground for young gods; at his command  
Paradise was isle-scattered on the sea;  
A pleasure-place for young divinity.

\* \* \* \* \*

O sing no more the Land of On  
Boreas blows his clarion.  
The phalanx of the hurricane,  
Whose herald is the hissing rain,  
Comes upon the swan-like ship,  
The masts are straws, the timbers rip.  
The talons of the tempest tear  
The sails, as when a woman's hair  
Is tangled in a tigress' grasp.  
The seamen cannot breathe, but gasp;

The hurricano fills the lungs  
With fire, and stabs the fearful tongues  
That else would shriek; the dragon sea  
Opens its jaws right fearfully.  
Another blast, and swiftly then  
Go down three hundred sailor-men.  
But one head shines upon the sea,  
'Tis princely Paragon's, and he  
Seizes on a cedarn mast  
That ocean hath unto him cast.  
Equal day and equal night  
Of moon abhorred and loathèd light  
Sail before his eyes, and then  
An isle, uncharted by the men  
Of ocean, swims before his sight.  
Not an isle of beauty bright  
As Archipelago of On  
Might show; the evening's arrows shone  
On a shore of russet gorse  
Where grey-haired billows beat with force  
On greyer granite, and the shriek  
Of seagulls sounded from each peak.  
Here the strife of sea and land  
Had as battle-ground the sand.  
The Christian earth against the pagan sea  
Stood with a stern and constant chivalry.  
There sloped a shelving shingly way  
From the tall cliffs unto the sea;  
And there was princely Paragon  
By the white wrath of breakers thrown,  
Bruised, and buffeted, and beat  
By the white sea's furious feet.

\* \* \* \* \*

Light again, for now the morn  
From the ranks of night hath torn  
Her bright banner ; Paragon  
'Neath a cliff of mottled stone  
Shudders as the day comes in ;  
Shudders as at a thought of sin—  
For the dawn's sharp, searching breath  
Is as a sword that smells of death  
In the nostrils ; but the air  
Warmer grows, more debonair  
Are the zephyrs, and the sea  
Laps the island peacefully,  
As a sated tiger's tongue  
The corse of that on which it sprung  
At thirsty nightfall eagerly  
Scorns it in the blinding day.  
The semicircle of the beach  
Is strewn with wreck along its stretch ;  
With vats of viands tossed up by seas,  
Butts of the brave bright wine of Ys.  
Soon his hunger Paragon  
Has banished ; then the isle of stone  
He searches for a shelter-place  
And within a little space  
Finds a sunless cavern where  
The leaping breakers do not dare.  
Then into the light again,  
Unhaunted by the sight of men,  
He walks, and ever walks the isle,  
And, as hours pass, a radiant smile  
Breaks upon his eyes and mouth,  
As one who ne'er the scarlet South  
Hath seen ; who penned by mountains bleak

One morn doth mount unto a peak,  
And from its snow-ensilvered summit sees  
The rose-red rapture of the Cyclades :

So is young Paragon : there lie  
The splendours of the inner eye  
Unfolded to him who had known  
But the loud glories of a throne.

“ *Oh there are isles whose mists and seas  
Are dearer than the plains of Ys.  
Torn from the continent of Dream  
For poets' dwellings ; where no gleam  
Of the sun's slow pageant comes,  
And where faint silver-sapphire glooms  
Fill every vista ; where the sand  
Burns for a spear-throw, then the hand  
Of dancing mist comes swiftly down,  
And where the star-untended moon  
Melts in the haze as pearls dissolve  
In magic waters, and resolve  
That which doth melt them to their hue,  
As blue skies make the ocean blue.  
Ah, Paragon, le roi d'Ys  
Thou hast the golden-silver keys  
Of this pearl-paradise ; arise !  
Unlock its gates !*” so from the skies  
Comes a far singing,—“ Where, oh where  
Is this blest bourne, O Child of Air ?”  
He cried, and as a silver bell,  
Replied the voice of Ariel.

“ *Thou hast found it O Paragon ;  
Found it here, in this Isle of Stone.  
To the poet the Land of On  
Is but—to be alone !*”

## LYRICS





## The Mermaid's Song

The foam is my cloud  
On the water above,  
Whence the Daughter of Love  
By the Gods was endowed  
With flesh as of snow,  
And soul of rainbow.

My stars are your eyes  
That gaze under the sea,  
And their wonder to me  
Is as your wild surprise  
When a comet your sight  
Doth assail in the night.

My moon is your face  
And I am its priestess,  
But my prayers, my distress,  
And my passion's disgrace  
Wake but echo's commotion  
In halls of the ocean.

My sun is your love,  
But its beams cannot pierce  
Through the waters so fierce,  
I will mount up above,  
With my arms clasp you round,  
Ah woe! you are drowned!

## The Ghost Glade

Ah, how remote, forlorn  
Sounded the sad sweet horn  
In forest gloom enchanted,  
I saw the shadows of kings go riding by,  
But cerements mingled and paled with their panoply,  
And the moss-ways deadened the steps of steeds that  
never panted.

Ah, what had phantasy  
In that sad sound to say  
Sad as a spirit's wailing?  
A call from over the seas of shadowland,  
A call the soul of the soul might understand,  
But never, ah never the mind, the steeps of soul  
assailing.

## Love and Music

Love and music are the eyes  
Gods see with in Paradise.  
Love and music are the ears  
With which the true celestial hears.  
Filch them forth of Eden, then  
Gods become as mortal men,  
And men immortal, being given  
All that they could take from heaven.

Love is soil and music sea  
In the realms of ecstasy.  
Love is body, song is soul.  
Melody's a golden bowl  
Holding love's ambrosial wine.  
Love is relic, song is shrine.  
Song is love, and love is song,  
But both dwell not with mortals long.

## Song

Sylla, gaze in the lagoon,  
See thy beauty glisten there,  
And haloed by the hornèd moon  
The silver'd sunshine of your hair.  
Shallow hearts and shallow waters  
Ne'er can mirror beauty's daughters,  
And the minstrel's sober tune  
Bids thee of such pools beware.

Read not in that stilly glass  
Legends of thine amorous eyes ;  
Remember fair Narcissus' pass,  
How gazing wrecked his paradise ;  
Mirror in some manly heart  
Thy fair reflex, just as thou art ;  
Trust not crystal, trust not brass,  
Fair thoughts they cannot recognise.

HASCHISH



# Haschish

(*A Fragment*)

I saw the palaces of Alraschid  
Through the pale windows of a changeful dream  
Glitter as frozen sea-foam, pyramid  
On pyramid of silver marble's gleam  
Ice roofed with moonlight, and the doors did  
    seem  
Nailed with bright planets that from heaven had  
    slid  
As meteors ; so Allah might have bid.  
A scarlet cloud of alchemie Moresque  
Illum'd the casements' spider Arabesque  
Reddening the rich intaglio  
Like magic squares of wine and snow  
In the moony courtyard far below.  
The moon-smit minarets on high  
With amber lamps are dimly dight  
And fountains in the fairy night  
Singing splash mellifluously.  
The Jinn the midnight fires of magic fan  
And horoscopes are cast in Isphahan ;  
And through the haunted casements came the  
    while  
The soul-assailing swiftness of a viol

So tender, rapt, and tense the tune  
I sank down in an instant swoon  
And rose above the minarets,  
The moony court, the fountain jets.  
The body seemed the rusty sheath  
My sword-like soul had left beneath.

\* \* \* \* \*

I saw a love-lamp darkly hid  
By a priestess in a pyramid ;  
Its ardent rose of flowery light  
Shone like hope in sorrow's night  
A wind from Eblis clomb the carven stair  
And plunged me in the darkness' fell despair  
I heard the rustling of Pharaoh's flesh  
Like moving parchment : odours did enmesh  
My senses, as in Persian cities  
Where the rose-conservers' ditties  
Fill the streets with song and fume  
Of attar and mimosa-bloom  
So did that sweetly-scented horror come  
Moving along the corridor as dumb  
As darkness ; with a shriek I fled  
From the all-too-odorous dead.  
A hand enwrapped in Sinim's spice  
Seized my soul as in a vice  
And turned my hot heart into ice . . . .

\* \* \* \* \*



SONNETS



## Calphurnia

Calphurnia, the crimson of thy cheek  
Thrills the cold spirit : thy sweet singing lips  
Telling of treasures from the Tyrian ships  
Make still more rich the gauds of which ye speak,  
The woven wealth of many a desert sheik  
All eloquent of roses, which eclipse  
The perfume that the swarthy Syrian sips,  
Or odours that the amorous Arabs seek.  
The sun is slain and buried in thy hair,  
And thy snow-shaming shoulders' symmetry  
Doth envy of the Cytherean dare  
Who rose foam-fashioned from a summer sea  
By glad Idalia ; oh, my sweet, beware  
The vengeance of relentless deity !

## Sonnets to the Sea-Folk

### I

As Rome, when the barbarian pomp did pour  
Into her palaces, all weakly wept :  
When Gaul and Goth, and that audacious sept,  
Vandals iconoclastic from the shore  
Of populous Teutonia, to explore  
Her treasures the Appennines o'erstept,  
So wilt thou weakly weep when they have crept,  
The same wild Vandals, with the same wild lore  
Of spoil and havoc, on the fenceless coasts  
Of England on some dark unguarded night,  
In perfect phalanx of well-ordered hosts,  
Helm hiding the barbarian from sight.  
What wilt thou then ? Go, call upon the ghosts  
Of those who made thee great for greater light.

## II

What trumpet can wake England? not the sound  
Of clarions calling to the camping fields,  
Nor the far cry of brotherhood that wields  
Colonial sceptre all the world around,  
Nor the pale fame of chivalry renowned  
Which chronicle from pageant pages yields  
When England wore the whitest of all shields,  
When England armed was an England crowned.  
New navies threaten all thy swarming seas  
And growl in leash beneath thine argent gates.  
That is not peace which trembles and agrees  
To anxious armistice, and cowering waits  
The blow inevitable; or on lease  
Buys false security and strength placates.

### III

Arm, and arm quickly, see the Vandal sails,  
See the black eagles o'er the ocean drawn!  
Who sleeps at night when war is with the dawn?  
Down to the ships! and curse the timid tales  
Of those who prattle of a peace that wails  
For friendship at the feet of foe forsworn.  
Let your coasts bristle, and aloft be borne  
The triune flag that freedom never fails.  
'Tis strength alone that wears the weeds of peace  
Whose smile is but the brightness of that sword  
Men call security: O let the seas  
Be weary of your ships, and your reward  
Will come when restless enmity cries "Cease!  
They ever grow, and empty is our hoard."

## To Field-Marshal Viscount Kitchener of Khartoum

Great Captain, whose victorious eyes have seen  
Triumphs in deserts, and the shattered spears  
Of the False Prophet's phalanx: who the tears  
Of England charmed to rapture when the sheen  
Of arms hid Southern Afric's golden-green,  
Turn now those eyes to England and her fears.  
A subtler foe than Buonaparte now peers  
Athwart the narrow firths with eagle mien.  
But worse foes stand within; our senate place  
Is swayed by hireling hounds, their mandate gained  
From ignorance and violence; they have reigned  
By fawning on the weakness of the race.  
O teach our England that her safety lies  
Not in inglorious ease, but sacrifice!

## Artemidorus

(Inspired by the valedictory inscription upon a mummy-case of the Græco-Roman period in the British Museum.)

“ Artemidorus, O farewell ! ” ’tis writ  
In slender Greek upon the mummy-case  
Beneath the painted semblance of a face  
Athenian locks above a brow well-knit.  
Artemidorus, O and wert thou smit  
At forty summers when in middle race  
Man has but found his destiny and place  
Expressing that for which God made him fit ?  
It seems to me we stand upon a shore  
Where waves arise with high and hungry swell  
To seize us, and anon and evermore  
He who stood by us in the waters fell  
Is gulfed, and then we cry exceeding sore  
“ Artemidorus, O farewell, farewell ! ”



ARION



TO MY ESTEEMED FRIEND  
HUBERT RICHARDSON, Esq.,  
OF LEICESTER  
I DEDICATE THIS TALE OF  
A POETIC FRIENDSHIP  
WITH SINCERE AFFECTION.

LEWIS SPENCE.



## Hymn to Hellas

O Hellas of harps, O halcyon Hellas,  
O eldest sister of sunful song,  
Mother of melody, tell, O tell us  
The bow is broken, the lyre is strung;  
That the harps are singing by Salamis,  
That the oracles mumur in Eleusis,  
That the liquid lilt of the lute will quell us  
And all the hate of the ancient wrong.

O Hellas of hymns, O hymnful Hellas,  
O mother of measures of majesty,  
Dumb for a day, when woe befel us,  
Now the world is full of the song of thee.  
By the sword-swept seas of Salamis  
Now lovers linger, and maidens kiss  
And the song of the swain by the sea doth tell us  
Of music in Hellas, in Hellas the free.

What will Apollo allow to the lyre of her,  
Dower all her dreamings with days of delight?  
Shall Aphrodite, the deathless desire of her  
Add to his magic the magic of night?

Songs of the sea when in summer it sings to her,  
Hymns of the hills when the zephyr-child clings to  
her,  
Songs of the suitors who, harping aspire to her,  
Songs of the spears that in Ilion did smite?

When the leopards of night o'erleap the splendour,  
The mirror of day, in the trembling west,  
The fading phalanx of gloom must render  
The city of stars to day's unrest  
And the fire on field, and the shimmer on sea,  
And the love of the lark on the lowland lea,  
And the trill of the thrush so timid and tender  
Are all with the blush of the morning blest.

So fades thy darkness, arise, arise !  
From thy moon-dewed mosses, O mystic maiden  
With flower-white fingers charm from the skies  
The murmur of melodies hymn-enladen  
In trances of Styx for ages sleeping  
And prisoned by time in a Place of Weeping,  
Now, freed to the vision of sunful skies,  
Breathe fires on the lyres that we have prayed on.

# Arion

## I

Ere the last murmurs of the Silver Age  
Were hushed in Hellas, and the sound of harps  
Resounded in those vales that after rang  
With sterner music of the Persian shields  
When songs were beat to swords at Salamis.  
White cities sprang from out the sacred soil  
Swift as a vision; Athens, Thebes arose  
Built to the hymns of an enchanted folk,  
Planned in a dream-night's phantasy: and thus  
Rose cloud-like Corinth, a metropolis  
As prophets say is raised in Paradise,  
Snow roofed with sunshine, in whose pillar'd depths  
Sat Periander, oligarch and king.  
Musing in music through the afternoon,  
And by his harp the young Arion sat  
Chief bard of Argolis, and brother-heart  
To Periander, and Apollo's self  
Were not more skilful to exalt that soul.  
For harpstrings by immortal fingers touched  
Are less than friendship's humblest melodies.  
The evening sun-shafts smote upon his cheek  
Rose upon marble, and the Phidian tool

Nor the great sculptor's goddess-carving steel,  
Miraculous chisel of Praxiteles,  
Ere won a nobler profile from the rock  
Of Paria's quarries than Arion's face.  
Betwixt them and the shore pale Corinth's fanes  
Glittered like frozen sea-foam on still waves  
Of billowy olives in encircling groves  
Where the foam-shaped Idalian shamed the sea  
That bore her, in a symmetry of stone,  
Hymned in soft choir whose sweet sinfonias  
Slew reason in swaying mobs that swine-like ran  
In Bacchic frenzy down the steep of wine.  
And as they gazed upon the flood afar  
Swinging towards Attica and Phocian shoals  
Arion said, "Kind master and kind king  
Say, is it better that a poet's heart  
Sing for a city, or for all the world?"  
And Periander, all his singer's soul  
Ever upon his lips, said "Verily  
"What bard would harp upon a single string  
Who had the wider compass of the seven  
At his command?" but as he spoke a dread  
Reined on his heartstrings as a mouthing steed  
Is checked in gallop by a charioteer  
And a dim wave of surmise swept his eyes  
Passed, and they sought his friend's, then sought the  
    sea  
And seeking one found both, for on the haze  
Where the blues met the singer's sea-blue eyes  
Caught the twin-azure's magic far away,  
As sailors see the haze of Hesperus.  
Then Periander with fraternal palm  
Laid on Arion's shoulder turned his face,



His hazel eyes above his bearded mouth  
Like stars o'er tree-tops, and his serious lips  
Parted in such a sigh, the lyre he held  
Responded in a second silver sigh  
He gravely said "Arion, would'st depart?"  
And the bright sign of a well-guarded wish  
Flamed on his comrade's cheeks and on his brow  
In hasty answer; but ere babbled words  
Could aught deny, there rose a dismal sound  
Of obsequy and mourning in the town,  
Unutterable grief that made the air  
Seem grey, and all the olives, cypresses  
Wailing arose, "O Creon, Creon, Creon!"  
"O lost, unhappy Creon!" and a surge  
Of weeping mourners made the sun-white street  
Like an unhappy dream, and then the king  
In sorrow for the folk said "Who was Creon?"  
"So in Bœotia or Arcadian fields  
" 'Who was Arion?' might men ask in vain  
" When lyres are all unlaurelled poets feel  
" To be unknown of men is to be dead.  
" Thy shipmen say that in Sicilia's isle  
" Bards throng to contest for the crown supreme  
" Of harp-resounding Hellas." "O Alas!"  
Quoth Periander, "Pray content thee here  
" 'Tis better to be poet to one heart  
" Than laureate unto a heartless world."  
Arion eager for fair fame, replied,  
" Ah do not hold me, Periander, king  
" Would you, a warrior, falter at the sound  
" Of morning clarions when the awakened camp  
" Starts into war, and thunder-making shields  
" Roll sonorous echoes down the assembled ranks;

" When the loud neighing of war-snuffing steeds  
 " Rivals the trumpets, and monotonous bows  
 " Their solitary note of slaughter sing,  
 " Would you then play the craven? Thus to me  
 " The strife of harpers and the bardic fray  
 " I scent the battle of song, and this strong lyre  
 " Calls unto other lyres across the sea  
 " As challenging trumpets call across a vale."  
 Said Periander then " No man may let  
 " Another while he carve his destiny  
 " My love for thee faints at the word 'farewell'  
 " As doth a mother's when her youngest son  
 " Girds him for battle, but, Arion, pause,  
 " The sea is cruel, and Sicily is far,  
 " Ah, there are islands where resistless song  
 " Draws to destruction; then the sweet, sad smiles  
 " Of melancholy mermaids, and the wrath  
 " Of great ship-shattering leviathans  
 " Lying in length as a peninsula  
 " In wait for argosies. On these reflect  
 " Then think of tempests when the scourgèd sea  
 " Is roofed with chaos, and the maniac winds  
 " Vie in a black destruction with the waves,  
 " With all the fury and insensate spleen  
 " Poseidon and Boreas in wrath  
 " Wreak upon earthlings; the mast-shattering gleam  
 " Of trident lightning hurling sail and spar  
 " To mutter of thunder from the trembling deck,  
 " O, think of these things ere ye put to sea."  
 Still, sat Arion, smiling, as a boy  
 Smiles at the fears of elders, " Such things are  
 " By the high 'hest of the immortal gods.  
 " 'Tis man's to bit the breakers, swathe the winds

" In guiding canvas ; as for grosser guiles  
" The nobler spirit thinks on scale and claw ;  
" So, Periander, with to-morrow's dawn  
" I take the sea, and sail for Sicily."

## II

Wooring soft winds the ship crept ever west  
Till one day from the sea rose Syracuse  
A city white, the moon of that sea's heaven  
Scattering such radiance from her silver stone.  
That charmed winds went whispering through the  
world

Legends of all her argent loveliness.  
And on her lap the weary wanton sea  
After much wandering laid her scattered hair  
With all its flowery wreaths of braided foam  
Far o'er the encircling sands, sapphire and snow  
Upon a golden pillow ; and anon  
She muttered murmurous in her magic sleep  
As dreaming thunder, and the-loosened sands  
Rolled down into her lap at every breath  
Auriferous tribute to her sovereignty.  
Swan-like to Syracuse the ship glides on  
The harbour's cool lagoon of waveless glass  
Holds out wide arms of welcome, and the scene  
Swarms with swart shipmen, and the speech of sea  
And babble of shrewd barter mingle there,  
And all the Parian circle of the quay  
Is splashed with pageantry of merchandise.  
Imperial purple from the vats of Tyre,  
Webs from the looms of magi, gemmy weaves,

And fleeces, shimmering as the sun-dipped wool  
Of Colchis, and the gleam of golden flowers  
Ripe fruits, abundant in a score of hues  
Citrons and quinces, and the desert date  
And sea-borne vintage from a land of vines;  
Red Cos and dusky Chian, and the gold,  
That water of the sun from the white grape  
Of young Massilia, and a thousand sweets,  
With tropic fragrance seiging all the sense;  
The rose-conserving oils of Araby  
And Tyrian triremes attar-fraught  
From odorous Ormuzd. As the vessel came  
Slowly to moorings, so the sailors sang.

*(Chorus of Sailors.)*

When the white sea-steeds by the winds are driven  
To sailors in ships full oft is woe  
With crash of timbers and decks a-riven  
With bellow of billows, aloft, alow.  
The galley goes galloping down the gale  
The mirth of winds and the scorn of seas  
The mast a straw and a leaf the sail  
And the course whatever the gods may please.

We awake to the wailing of winds  
We are lulled by the sea in our sleep  
For the sea is a mistress who binds  
Those who love her in slavery deep  
We are charmed by the sound of the surge  
As a siren it sings to our souls;  
'Tis our sleep-song, our day-dream, our dirge  
As it sways or it rolls.

But a life on the sea is a prayer,  
We are nearer the gods on the sea,  
And no mirth ever comes to us there,  
For its mystery murders our glee.  
There is wine, there is laughter ashore.  
There are lips that are waiting to kiss,  
We'll go down to the sea nevermore—  
So we sing in our bliss.

But the siren sea with a single whisper  
Shatters the bonds that bind us ashore,  
Though mother and wife and the infant lisper  
Hold us back and ever implore.  
She weds in witchery, and she weaves  
So subtle a song in her serpentry  
Around the soul, that ever she cleaves  
To him who is stamped with the seal of the sea.

His eager foot upon the marble set  
Arion heard the clamour of a crowd  
Adown a vista striving heads and heels  
Rushed by commingled in a monster mob  
A hurrying hydra ; wondering the bard  
Called unto one too old to follow them  
Questing the cause of such impatient haste  
"I know not and I care not," he replied  
But would be garrulous of other things  
Touching himself, his agues and his aches  
The leech's ignorance, his son's neglect.  
A boy played ball upon a temple-side  
But, asked the mob's haste and direction, he  
Turned, stared, and blushed, displaying in his mien

The wordlessness of quickly-questioned youth.  
And so stood silent. Then a housewife passed  
Muttering her marketings and counting o'er  
Some bargain's slim advantage. Glib of tongue  
She answered " In the amphi theatre  
There is a strife of rhymesters for a prize,  
A treasure worth the half of Sicily ;  
Thus can an idle singer in an hour  
Reap what a myriad days can never bring  
To worthy labour ; " and passed on her way.  
Back to the ship Arion panting sped,  
Cast all his sea-stained weeds, and doned a robe  
Of Tyrian purple, festal, fair attire ;  
Perfumed himself with Persian roses' blood,  
Attuned his lyre to mark its harmony,  
Then to the place of contest ; all the streets  
Seemed as the city in siesta lay.  
The sun smote walls to hue of yellow wine  
Awnings cast azure shadows on the stones  
All seemed adrowse ; but as a mountain bursts  
Upon the forest-farer when he sees  
Through scanty trees a tall eternal alp  
Usurp horizons, so the argent mass  
Of the empillared hippodrome arose  
Cliff-like eclipsing all the lesser fanes.  
As a volcano which interior fires  
Have robbed of half its bulk, so towered the walls  
And from its bowels, as volcan's murmur came  
Confusion of a myriad of tongues.  
There stood before the portal heralds seven  
Punctilious in office, deep in doubts,  
Negation in their consult ; but at last  
Indulgent to King Periander's name



They led the bard to Syracuse's Prince  
Who smiling granted entrance to the fray.  
Then to his seat by portly ushers grave  
The youth was brought amid the assembled bards  
Of Greece and all her sunny colonies.  
There many lyres had stirred Hellenic hearts  
To scorn the sterner measure of the spears,  
And vied with trumpets to create the wrath  
Heard in the trampling cohorts' iron tread,  
Fill plumêd phalanxes with patriot power ;  
Or in Ilissian arbours told of love  
With tender lyres that never dreamt of war.  
Then at the trumpet's summons one arose  
And sang of battle to a loud-swept lyre  
A song of spears, and terrors of old Troy  
The stately tale of that high tournament  
When Hector, tamer of the Phrygian steeds,  
Met angry Aias by the rampart dread  
Where burning ships charred to the beaming blue  
of Mediterranean, and the golden sands  
Drank in more blood than all the Trojan swords.  
He ceased : then quivered all the sun-gold air  
With thunder of palms and peal of proud applause  
Such as make warriors when they learn of war.  
Which hushed the instant that a rival rose.  
Not of opposing champions, nor the noise  
Of unmelodious battle breathed this lyre  
But of the sweets of fancy's fair domain,  
Of the rose-riot of the Cyclades  
Where folk see nereids' faces in the foam,  
And in wood-flowers the gleam of dryads' eyes.  
Not from Olympus, or the upsoaring snows  
Of sacred mountains did such music come :



But from dim valleys and the moon-filled woods  
Where half a-dream the deep light-loathing eye  
Sees sylphs in sweet procession on the moss,  
And ears aweary of a clamorous world  
Through hours of well-lost sunshine lie and hark  
To murmur of leaf and bee, of breeze and bird  
And so, and so, the grave and gay did sing  
Of love, and war, of death—of everything.  
Then rose Arion his enraptured theme  
Friendship, its woes, its blisses, and its crown,  
And all the soft Sicilian poethood  
Sat silent, knowing that their king was there ;  
Rose in applause the amphitheatre,  
Rose prince, peer, peasant, proletarian,  
With pæn of plaudits—and the prize was won.

### III

Farewell at sunset to sweet Sicily  
With dying passion of the day suffused.  
White Syracuse lies as a sun-stained moon,  
Her shore the first step in some happy dream  
Seen at the opening of the gates of sleep.  
The rounded hills seem the dark breasts of night,  
And the dim trees her hair, set with young stars  
The while she lies upon the brink of heaven  
Asleep before her rising; the faint grass  
Is spangled with the silver sweat of clouds;  
And where the river winds unto the sea  
It seems as if the moon had melting run  
Adown the sky, and dropped upon the plain.  
A playground for young gods! Arion stood  
At the ship's stern and watched the shadows close  
Thicker and thicker, till the city seemed,  
Its flickering fires now falling in the sea,  
As a veiled lady walking in the night  
With torches from some famous festival,  
Her progress jewelling the Egyptian gloom,  
Then with a sigh, the sire of many songs,  
He laid him down below the straining sail.

\* \* \* \* \*

Three days, three nights, thus spent the swan-like  
ship

And on the third the seamen threw the dice  
For beakers of the wine of Sicily.  
Till one, a man of Corinth, crazed with loss,  
Said, "Comrades, will ye cast for vinegar  
When such a treasure as yon stranger won  
Lies for the taking 'neath a rotten sail?"  
Then, wordless, all arose, and stole to where  
Cinctured with sleep, and bound with moony bonds  
Arion slept. As swayed the moon-swept ship  
His lips moved with the songs of Syracuse,  
But ceased as strangling fingers found his throat.  
Death is a fable to the ears of youth,  
And but believed through sorrow of the years,  
And all incredulous Arion rose  
To face the slayers, swart men, strong and grim,  
Bespent with sins and seas, and tempest-tanned  
Their golden honesty all turned to lead  
At sight of leaden gold, and their stout souls  
Made murderous with misery of gain.  
And as they stood in parley, the young day  
Rose in his royal scarlet o'er the sea  
And burned their brows with blood, and in their eyes  
Thrust bloody fingers, showing all their guilt.  
There stood they like bayed beasts, all flash and fang.  
No son of song knows fear, Arion swift,  
Felt for his falchion, but the cunning crew  
Had sunk the saving steel deep in the sea  
A thing for mermaids' marvel, or a boon  
To some sad nereid who had found a life  
Dismal in ocean; so the youth at loss  
Said "Sailors, share the treasure, spare a life  
For which the gates of manhood scarce have oped.  
So shall ye be rewarded;" but one man,

A grim grey leader, like a waiting wolf,  
Spake swift, "Arion, now accept thy fate,  
Yield now to steel, or to the heaving sea,  
Resign thyself," and he disconsolate,  
Pled to go, swan-like, singing, to the sea,  
Clad in his poet's robes and laurel-crowned.  
'Tis not alone the sinless soul that sings,  
Music may make a murder or a prayer,  
And viols may wet the eyes of villainy.  
Our minds are mansions that have many rooms,  
But in the meanest hovel of a brain  
Is one resplendent chamber. Golden Greece  
Had no man born, from Scio's sightless son  
Down to her saddest slave, to whom the muse  
Was not as Naxian nectar from the vines  
Of Dionysus; and the throb of harps  
Sweeter than spiced wines of the winter moons.  
These slaves of gold were slaves of music too,  
And fain to hear him who had won the prize  
Consented to his singing. Then Arion  
Clothing himself in purple raised his lyre  
And crowned with laurel stood above the prow  
Straight set for Corinth; then unto the sea,  
And with sea's sob in his harp he sang:  
"Poseidon, to thy palaces of peace,  
"Green as the night grass smitten by the stars,  
"I now descend by the sad stair of death  
"I grieve not for thy glooms, for well I know  
"Song is a sceptre that hath sway with gods,  
"As hath been proved in Hades. As for ye  
"Sick slaves of silver, my returning shade  
"Shall walk beside you on the ships you sail  
"Till the dire day of drowning that you dread."

So, singing, sprang he seawards, and the foam  
Silvered the sunshine of his hair, as when  
A maiden's golden head beneath the moon  
Reflects its argent. So he sank to drown  
Senseless in swoon into the siren sea.

\* \* \* \* \*

Meanwhile the sweet and most unwonted notes  
Of harpsong on the main had spread afar  
And sea-steeds of the Tritons, dolphins grey,  
On which the trumpeters of Neptune ride  
And herald his procession with their shells,  
Spellbound by music swam beside the ship  
And marked the drowning harper; one great fish  
Charger of Proteus, prophet of the deep,  
Who, bound by Aristæus, lord of bees,  
Ran through the elements his subtle shape  
In swift evasion; and this dolphin wise  
Hollowed his back, and shaped it as a selle,  
And the spent singer in his drowning spasm  
Seeing in this the finger of a god,  
Seized the strange sea-steed by his bristling fin  
And vaulted on his shoulders; the fleet fish  
Unseen of sailors for the rising sea,  
Swift sought the shallows, and the friendly shore  
Received the singer as a mother's arms  
The staggering infant fearful of a fall.

\* \* \* \* \*

Corinth was red with evening when slow steps  
Brought him, bespent, to Periander's courts  
Where sat the king in twilight and in tears  
Dead to all music as a shattered harp.

Who, seeing sudden in his sea-stained weeds  
Him whom the villain seamen said was drowned  
Sat shuddering till the sandals' ringing steps  
Told him no spirit sought the peristyle.  
Then through the early starlight eyes did meet  
Before glad voices called. With wordless joy  
Unto his king Arion had returned.

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